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ABSTRACT

The Instructional Support Team (IST) Project of Pennsylvania identifies effective instructional approaches for students prior to referral for special education and helps support students with disabilities in regular classroom environments. Pennsylvania State Special Education Regulations and Standards require the IST process in schools that have grades K-6; all 501 school districts are expected to have IST in place by the 1997-98 school year. The IST program has been successful in decreasing the need for special education for students in the regular classroom; 1992-93 data revealed that schools using IST referred up to 46 percent fewer students for evaluation for special education than schools that had not yet undertaken the process. Schools using the IST process have also seen the number of students retained in grade reduced by as much as 272 percent. Finally, studies have demonstrated that schools with high levels of implementation produced better results for students' learning than schools with low levels of implementation. A brochure describing the IST program and five information sheets on special education placements, student retention, inclusion, essential school services, and staff development are included. (Contains 23 references.) (ND)

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IST

The Instructional Support Team

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IST Basic Information Booklet

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INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Chapter 14 of the Special Education Regulations and Chapter 342 of the Special Education Standards require school districts to institute the Instructional Support Team (IST) process in schools that house grades K through 6 by 1995. The Pennsylvania State Board of Education determined that a phase-in period would be allowed for instructional support requirements. As of the 1994-1995 school year, all 501 school districts have implemented instructional support in at least one school; nearly 1,400 schools have initiated the program to date. All 1,969 elementary schools and 489 middle schools are expected to have IST in place by the 1997-1998 school year.

- Act 211 stipulates that the IST will provide Student Assistance services to students and their families. The IST incorporates the functions of and takes the place of the Student Assistance Program (SAP) team at the elementary level.

- Instructional Support at the secondary level (grades 7-12) is permissible under Act 16 of 1993; however, it is not required.

- The Commonwealth's financial support for instructional support reached $11 million during the 1994-1995 school year. Funds are used by school districts to initiate the program and to offset the costs of the support teacher.

- Instructional Support Teams include the building principal, the student's regular classroom teacher, the support teacher assigned to that building, and others, as appropriate.

- The Department of Education, through the Instructional Support Team Project and Student Assistance staff, provides training for schools participating in the Instructional Support Initiative during their first year of operation. Intermediate Units, under the Statewide Support Initiative, provide follow-up training.

- Training in Instructional Support consists of the following components: collaboration and team building, instructional assessment, instructional adaptation, effective interaction patterns / student discipline / behavior management, and student assistance for at-risk issues.

- The Instructional Support process is used to identify effective instructional approaches for students prior to referral for special education as well as to help support students with disabilities in regular classroom environments.

- The IST program has been successful in decreasing the need for special education for students in the regular classroom. Data from the 1992-93 school year indicate that schools using IST refer up to 46% fewer students for evaluations for special education than schools that have not yet undertaken the process.

- Schools using the IST process have also substantially decreased the numbers of students retained in grade, decreasing the use of retention by as much as 272%.

- School districts have been overwhelmingly positive in their implementation of instructional support. After two years of training, approximately 98% of schools are validated as having the program in place according to pre-set criteria.

- Studies have demonstrated that schools who implement the IST program with high levels of implementation produce better results for students' learning than schools that show low levels of implementation.

THE INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT PROCESS IN PENNSYLVANIA

The Instructional Support Team

Teachers have always been challenged, sometimes puzzled, and frequently frustrated when a student does not "fit in" with the rest of the class. Every teacher has experienced the student who acts inappropriately or disruptively, or who seems constantly lag behind the rest of the class academically. Both teachers and parents know that this student needs help. Many of these students were referred for evaluation and placed in special education programs where they received the specialized attention they required. However, many students who have been removed from regular education would have been able to achieve in a regular classroom if given the proper help.

In response to this situation the 1990 Pennsylvania Special Education Regulations and Standards stipulated that each elementary (K-6) school develop an Instructional Support Team (IST). Over a five year phase-in period, all 501 Pennsylvania school districts have initiated the IST program in order to assist any elementary student (grades K through 6) who is experiencing difficulty functioning successfully in the classroom due to consistent academic or behavioral problems. The instructional support process helps schools to create a seamless system within the school where assistance for the student who is at risk for school failure is provided in the regular classroom.

Although members of the Instructional Support Team may differ from school to school, the team always includes the building principal, the student's classroom teacher, and the support teacher. Parents are encouraged to participate as members of the team. School psychologists, remedial math and reading specialists, guidance counselors, speech therapists, school nurses, or other classroom teachers may also serve on the IST, depending on the needs of the child. The support teacher is selected by the school district to assist regular education teachers in meeting goals set by the team. Support teachers are specially trained and work under the direction of the school principal. Their duties are related to the procedures and timelines of the IST process. The support teacher works directly with students to assess their needs in the classroom and to model strategies for teachers, parents, and others who may provide direct services and support to the child. In all cases, the IST plans for the support teacher to 'phase out' direct involvement with a student in favor of the classroom teacher or other regular education personnel.

Support for Teachers

The IST program addresses the challenge of helping students who are having trouble in school through a positive, success-oriented approach that uses specific assessment and intervention tactics to help remove educational and behavioral stumbling blocks for elementary children in the regular classroom. It is a team approach designed to assist students to function successfully in the elementary school environment. The goal of the IST program is to maximize individual student success in regular classes. Successful implementation of instructional support typically leads to a decrease in the number of referrals and placements of students in special education classes, and an increase in the strategies used by teachers which lead to success for all students.

The instructional support process is based on the concept that teachers need assistance in meeting the increasingly complex academic, behavioral, social, and emotional needs of their students. The IST is a working group of teachers and other school professionals that helps teachers find solutions to their instructional challenges through precise, classroom-based assessment and collaborative problem-solving. This non-threatening atmosphere helps teachers recognize that they are not solely responsible for resolving a student's difficulties; rather, the entire school has a role in each student's success.

The IST also works to assure that the entire continuum of regular education services are coordinated in meeting the needs of all students. Too often a student fails in spite of a wide range of available programs because services are not coordinated to meet the student's needs. This concern applies both to school-based services (e.g., Chapter I, guidance, school psychology, bilingual education, etc.) as well as external services provided by community agencies. The instructional support process directly addresses service coordination so that students do not "fall through the cracks."

All of these manifestations of instructional support are based on a systematic search for what will work for the student so that success will be realized. This search and the managing of resources to maintain success for the student is the essence of instructional support.

Helping All Students Succeed

The IST does more than hold meetings to assist teachers. For each student identified as needing instructional support, a team member, usually the support teacher, works in the classroom in support of the regular classroom teacher by assessing the student and testing possible strategies for student success. Working as equal partners, the teacher and support teacher pool their information on the student to define clearly a student's problems and to begin to explore what might work for a student. The team then meets to use this information in developing an intervention plan, relying on a collaborative problem-solving process in which the classroom teacher is an critical member.

Keeping students successful in regular education is a cornerstone of the instructional support process. Through the implementation and evaluation of the intervention plan, the IST can identify what works in the regular classroom; therefore, the need for special education can be diminished. Through instructional assessment, the IST helps distinguish if students can profit from interventions in regular education, or if they require services and programs that extend beyond regular education to be successful (i.e., special education). By assessing the effectiveness of the team's intervention plan, each student's "degree of need" for instructional support and special education programs and services is determined.

Instructional assessment begins with classroom-based procedures that precisely examine each student's academic skills and classroom behavior. From this information, teaching strategies are developed and implemented in the classroom during the instructional support period. The student's reaction to the plan is a critical aspect of the assessment. When effective instructional practices afford a student the chance to succeed in a regular class, there is no need for special education. If the student does not progress in spite of precisely defined instruction, or if student progress only comes through extraordinary efforts that cannot be sustained, a multidisciplinary evaluation may be indicated.

Including Students with Disabilities

It is increasingly clear that students with disabilities can be effectively educated in a regular class environment. Staff resources are used in new and creative ways when schools believe that supporting a student with a disability in a regular class setting is the first and preferred option. In these schools, the IST serves as a bridge between special and regular education. When a student with a disability is involved in regular environments for participation over all or part of the school day, the IST can help the regular class teacher develop accommodations to promote the student's success. The team also can facilitate the best use of support services to help the teacher meet the student's specially designed instructional needs as stated on the Individual Education Program (IEP). In this way, when a special educator or related service provider delivers the specialized instruction, it can be given within the context of the regular education class.

INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT TRAINING

Training in instructional support is provided by the Instructional Support Team Project, an initiative sponsored by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. The Commonwealth's training design for elementary instructional support includes the assignment of a training specialist, the Instructional Support Consultant, to each school that enters IST training. This individual assists the school principal and other team members in the design, planning, and implementation of a multi-year training effort that is to involve all members of the professional staff as well as parents and community members. This effort requires changes in many established practices and procedures, especially those involving the role of the classroom teacher in addressing the needs of students with learning, behavior, and emotional needs.

On-Site Training

Because IST is a state-mandated program, training and support services are provided at the local level during a school district's first year of participation in the program. During the first year, IST Consultants provide intensive guidance in the development of Instructional Support Teams by organizing in-district training on the critical components of instructional support, by offering guided practice on the components for support teachers and team members, and by coordinating local networks of support teachers and teams. After the first year, school districts continue to receive on-going training and support through the Statewide Support Initiative of their local intermediate unit. By providing the training in the school sites, consultants have the opportunity to provide guided practice and demonstration in the classroom. The district has the opportunity to have many of its personnel participate without the added cost and effort of sending personnel out of the district. The general aim of instructional support training is the development of effective techniques that will give the regular education teacher the ability not only to solve the learning problems of one child, but also to generalize that knowledge to serve the needs of each child in the class.

Principals' Training

Elementary school principals participate in Pennsylvania's Principal Training Model, a multi-day workshop and seminar offered by the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the Instructional Support Team Project. This training, offered the summer prior to the school's participation, provides principals with intensive training in each of the components of IST. Principals work with other building principals who have experience with the program. During this training, regional networks of building principals are organized for follow-up and on-going support. Over 1,000 principals have participated in this training; it is held each year at PDE's Curriculum Conference at Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania, as well as at other locations throughout the State.

COMPONENTS OF TRAINING

In order to provide effective instructional support to a wide range of students in the regular classroom, training in critical educational practices and processes is essential. The training components that have been identified for inclusion in the IST training initiative are based on educational research on school effectiveness, as well as on the results of pilot programs undertaken in Pennsylvania.

Collaboration and Team Building

The central element of an effective instructional support process is staff collaboration. Collaboration is a process whereby people work together to address issues related to students' learning. Collaboration involves a mutual effort to plan, implement, and evaluate the educational program for a particular student. It consists of joint or coordinated actions by team members to reach their common goal (Morsink, 1991). West and Idol (1987) have described collaboration as "an interactive process which enables people with diverse expertise to solve school-based problems in teaching, learning and curriculum. The outcome is enhanced, altered, and produces solutions that are different from those that the individual team members would produce independently" (p. 389-390). The objectives of collaboration are to facilitate mutual acceptance among co-workers, establish clear and honest lines of communication, develop mutual understanding and agreement about how to work together, and provide effective services to students (Idol, Paolucci-Whitcomb, & Nevin, 1986).

Three particular aspects of collaboration have been incorporated into the development of the instructional support process: team building, problem-solving, and team maintenance. Team building and maintenance focus on the establishment of an effectively working team, and on those procedures that allow the team to continue to function in a thorough and efficient manner. The problem-solving approach gives the team a structure through which individual student difficulties are addressed. The purposes of using a collaborative problem-solving approach are to prevent learning and behavioral problems, to remediate learning and behavioral problems, and to coordinate instructional programs (West and Idol, 1990).

Through the collaborative problem-solving process, the team helps the classroom teacher to identify the student's specific school difficulty, set measurable goals, and identify effective instructional strategies. The process also assures that the identified strategy is established and supported in the classroom through the assistance of team members (e.g., a support teacher). Finally, success of the intervention is evaluated and plans are made for the continuation of successful strategies.

In addition to in-class interventions, the IST facilitates collaborative activities with school specialists (e.g., school psychologist, guidance counselor) as well as with community agencies. By establishing a climate of collaboration among school personnel, it assures that the continuum of services within and outside of the school is managed so that students do not "fall through the cracks." Teachers and specialists receive training in solving problems systematically, understanding the communication process, and working together as a team. With the building principal setting the tone, the IST works to guarantee that all services in regular education are utilized to meet students' needs, and that community services are accessed whenever needed. Most important in this approach is close communication with the student's parents, essential partners in resolving the problem.

Throughout the IST problem-solving, collaborative efforts change features of instruction, classroom management, curriculum, and/or teacher behavior. Whether the student has an academic, behavioral, social, or affective problem, the strategies are implemented in the classroom by existing instructors. Consequently, the collaborative interactions that occur during the instructional support process range from individual discussions between the classroom teacher and a team member to the involvement of a variety of teachers and specialists. In all cases there is active involvement of the classroom teacher, the support teacher, the principal, and the parents.

Instructional Assessment

Instructional assessment is a process that systematically analyzes a student's response to instructional strategies in a sequence of study. It includes procedures that directly assess performance within course content for the purpose of determining instructional needs. Unlike traditional norm-referenced types of assessment that test the student on unfamiliar material, a critical feature of instructional assessment is its use of actual classroom materials to gauge classroom performance. It provides teachers and other educators with an unprecedented level of precision in evaluating a student's academic needs.

Initially based on the concept of curriculum-based assessment (Coulter, 1985; Gickling and Thompson, 1985; Hargis, 1987; Tucker, 1985), instructional assessment allows educators to analyze mismatches between the student's instructional level and the demands of the tasks faced on a daily basis. This approach is tied to the principle that prolonged student failure and confusion is often a direct result of failure by the school to assure a consistent instructional match between the student and the curriculum. Instructional assessment is a dynamic process used to identify and refine instructional strategies that have a high probability of success, and to guide instruction as the student learns. Instructional assessment is naturalistic and occurs in a classroom under everyday conditions.

Gickling (1992) reports that school districts and state departments of education are undergoing a dramatic shift in how they approach educational assessment. This change of perception of how the purposes and practices of assessment are currently viewed represents a departure from the use of both skill-based and traditional norm-referenced testing practices which have dominated our educational systems for decades. Gickling further indicates the need to return to more natural types of assessment practices which existed in former years. Assessment must impact directly upon both teaching and learning. As teaching and assessment practices change in more student-oriented directions, the gap between class content and the content of traditional tests becomes wider. Instead, techniques such as portfolio assessment and work-sample approaches represent a major step in designing alternatives intended to promote a better alignment of assessment and instruction.

Assessment means literally "to sit beside." The use of instructional assessment encourages educators literally to sit beside students for selected periods of time in the classroom while they learn in order to determine what they know and are able to do. Consideration of the students' prior knowledge, provision of an appropriate level of challenge without frustration, and frequent and continuous task success are key components of instructional assessment.

In addition to its use in designing and guiding instruction, the process of instructional assessment also allows the instructional support team to screen students for consideration for multidisciplinary evaluation to determine special education eligibility. Through the instructional assessment process, the student's reaction to specifically developed interventions in the regular classroom is measured according to the student's rate of learning of the curriculum-based tasks. The concept of rate of learning is based on the common observation that students learn skills at different speeds and with different levels of support needed for the acquisition and retention of new material.

The student's rate of learning may be analyzed according to the rate of acquisition and rate of retention. The rate of acquisition is defined as the relative ease with which a student learns new information or acquires appropriate skills. The rate of retention is defined as the ability of the student to retain and use information or skills in meaningful ways. Each of these concepts presumes the provision of an intervention period (e.g., through the IST process) during which the student's academic functioning is assessed directly in curriculum materials, or during which behavior and social skills are assessed in the regular school environment. Following these assessments, specific interventions are implemented, technical assistance is provided to support the instruction, and the student's progress is analyzed according to his/her ability to acquire and retain the learned material.

Since the inception of the IST program, many schools that have implemented these procedures have substantially decreased the numbers of students who require special education to succeed in school. At the same time, they have also decreased use of retention in grade for these students, showing that students were truly helped

by this process. In addition to preventing the need for special education through early implementation of effective strategies, the instructional assessment helps to assure that special education is provided for those students who are most in need of specially designed instruction, i.e., those who fail to succeed in spite of precisely defined instruction provided at the appropriate level.

Instructional Adaptation

Many students in the regular classroom display learning difficulties yet are not eligible for special education services. These students may have problems in reading text, participating in class discussions, organizing information, working independently, completing in-class assignments, locating and sequencing information, writing legibly, listening to class presentations, communicating through written expression and completing homework assignments. As these students approach the middle school years, they may also have trouble taking notes, studying for tests, using complicated study guides, and applying general study skills. In spite of these difficulties, these students can make progress in regular education environments through adaptation in instruction and assessment.

The purpose of the instructional adaptation component of instructional support is to provide teachers with models for adapting materials and performance evaluations. Instructional materials adaptation requires changing the format of instructional materials without changing the content. Performance adaptations require the same performance from students, but in alternative formats. The goal of both approaches is to provide students with different ways to learn the same content and demonstrate mastery.

The instructional adaptation component of IST is based on the work of Project ADAPT (Huck, et. al., 1989) which was developed in Pennsylvania prior to the institution of ISTs. The materials included in the manual were developed and field-tested in actual classrooms in western Pennsylvania. In adapting instructional materials, eight activities are highlighted: structured study guides, information organizers, skeletal outlines, what-you-need-to-know charts, concept activities, application activities, games, and manipulatives.

In addition to adapting instruction, students with learning needs also require adapted approaches to classroom assessment. In this area, traditional classroom tests are adapted in order to allow students to display their knowledge without being penalized for poor test-taking skills. Techniques used to adapt tests include alternatives to written tests, modifications of written questions, simplification of response levels, and modification of testing materials. In addition, techniques to adapt grading procedures are presented, including multiple grading, coded grading, grade contracts, accommodation checklists, and incentive grading.

Effective Interaction Patterns/Student Discipline/Behavior Management

One of the most complex problems today in the field of education is the school's ability to manage student discipline problems. In successful schools, parents, students, and educators work together to attain good discipline. The approach to classroom discipline that has been incorporated in the IST process is based on the establishment of effective interaction patterns between adults and students.

The notion that interactions between parents, teachers, and students are critical in the resolution of classroom discipline problems can be traced to the family systems approach of Haley and Hoffman (1968), Madanes (1981), and Minuchin (1974). Recently, Valentine (1987), 1988) has formulated this approach into a series of procedures that have direct relevance to the resolution of difficult discipline problems in the classroom. The model focuses on communication patterns between adults (teachers and parents) and students. It examines what teachers actually say and do, and compares and contrasts effective and ineffective patterns of communication and interaction.

Valentine (1987) has theorized that communication and interaction patterns are first formed by underlying belief systems. These belief systems have the effect of channeling or limiting one's expectations for a student. These expectations are then communicated to the student as unclear or mixed messages. For example, if it is believed that for some reason the student is not able to stop fighting because of the family he comes from, the adult holding that belief will express doubt about the student by giving vague, unclear directions to the student, (e.g., "See, if you can control yourself just this once."). Belief systems may be examined and challenged by looking for evidence that the student can behave and do as expected, thus removing excuses that might be used for allowing the student to misbehave.

Once the adult believes that the student is capable of appropriate behavior, the adult's communications to the student can be analyzed for their effectiveness in conveying a clear message to the student. There are numerous common expressions in our language that convey to the student that the behavior is not really expected (e.g., "Just try to behave."). The critical step in establishing classroom discipline is replacing these unclear or misleading communications with statements that clearly convey the teacher's expectations.

When student behavior does not conform, even in the face of clearly worded directions, positive back-up techniques are designed. These techniques, summarized in an individual discipline plan, emphasize assisting the student to perform the required task/behavior rather than punishing him or her for failing to comply. Including parents from the beginning is critical if the program is to succeed. The parents' support is solicited from the initiation of the plan so that the student knows that the parents and the school agree on their expectations for appropriate school behavior. The student is clearly prevented from "playing one side against the other."

The effective interaction patterns approach also facilitates the involvement of school psychologists, guidance counselors, and mental health specialists from community agencies in cases of severe behavior problems. Working with the school, family, and student, the mental health practitioner assists the team to address the student's difficulties.

Training in consistent methods of classroom discipline through effective interaction patterns provides an effective complement to the IST's focus on student coping skills. While this model emphasizes reactions to student discipline problems, the student assistance component addresses the necessity to build students' personal resiliency skills which can prevent discipline problems from developing.

Student Assistance for At-Risk Issues

In today's world, many children are forced to deal with a range of stressful events and trauma, including exploitation by others and the impact of other stressors (e.g., abuse, neglect, loss, chemical dependency, mental health problems, unemployment, etc.) that place them at risk for current school failure and eventual long term impairment. Life crises are often manifested in behavior problems and/or deficits in academic performance in the classroom. The link between an environmental stressor and resultant performance problem in school can be traced to the affected students' absence of coping skills.

The student assistance component of instructional support training addresses the need to build personal coping skills which prevent discipline problems from developing. The training focuses on life skills and strategies to affect deficiencies in self-concept, identification and communication of feelings, decision-making and social interaction skills. This component provides a context for interventions that address the whole child.

Four coping skills have been identified which, when lacking, often lead to problems in school:

> *Self-Concept: Numerous authors have articulated the relationship between family background variables and self-concept (e.g., Coopersmith, 1967; Valentine, 1980). When the feeling of "I am capable" is missing, behaviors ranging from shyness to aggressiveness are frequently observed.
>
> Strategies for improving self-concept include helping students to perceive their connectedness to others, their own sense of uniqueness, and their power over their own lives (Clemes, 1981). The development of a sense of self-competence is a critical step in improving self-esteem.

***Identification and Communication of Feelings:** Many students facing stressful life environments have difficulties in identifying their feelings. These children truly do not know how they are feeling because they have spent too much energy suppressing feelings. In addition, the need to learn how to communicate feelings to trusting, caring adults is an important skill that these students need to learn. Without this skill, feelings are often demonstrated by anger, rage, or apathy. In instructional support, specific strategies (e.g., "I feel" and "I want" messages) are developed to help students to learn these skills (cf. Lindquest & Molnar, 1989).

***Social Interaction:** The child who is "at risk" is often identified as the bully, teaser, withdrawn, or perfect child. The lack of effective social skills will interfere with the development of children's personal happiness and prevent the building of satisfying relationships with others (Gresham & Reschly, 1986). The instructional support process helps students learn pro-social skills that are likely to prevent discipline problems and other expressions of inappropriate behavior (Gresham, 1985).

***Decision-Making:** Children who react instead of using a thought-out response, or those who decide <u>not</u> to decide because they feel powerless over their lives, often pose management problems in school. Students who learn strategies to control these impulsive behaviors have been shown to decrease their frequency of behavior problems. Self-management techniques (Clabby & Elias, 1986; Meichenbaum, 1977) that have been demonstrated as effective in helping students to improve their decision making skills are effective strategies in helping students to avoid inappropriate behavior.

The instructional support process assists teachers and parents to help students develop these appropriate resiliency skills that will lead to appropriate adjustment to school. This component facilitates interventions that address the "whole child."

Special Trainings

In addition to the five basic training components, the IST Project provides specialized training to better serve the needs of all students in the Commonwealth:

Inclusion of students with severe disabilities: Some school districts have successfully used the IST program to facilitate inclusion of students with disabilities. In conjunction with the GATEWAYS Project, the IST Project provides training to volunteer Instructional Support Teams in best practices for working with students with severe disabilities in regular environments.

IST for students who are culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD): In many areas, ISTs are faced with the issue of how to appropriately meet the needs of students from other cultures. The identification of effective instructional strategies is especially critical for non-English dominant students. The IST Project provides specialized training with selected school districts that have large CLD populations.

EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE IST PROCESS

Validation

Validation determines the effectiveness of a school's implementation of the IST Process. In its second year of implementation, a school's IST program is evaluated by validation teams, organized through the Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education. This three person team might include a principal, support teacher, guidance counselor, school psychologist, special or regular education teacher, intermediate unit consultant, or IST consultant. The team's task is to determine whether a school has all required IST elements in place. Specifically, the validation process assesses:

* Implementation of required elements.
* Need for improvement in one or more elements.
* Exemplary implementation of one or more elements.

The validation process consists of interviews with team members, parents, teachers and students, observation of classrooms and team meetings , and the assessment of various forms. The features which are evaluated are:

(1) **Organization and management of the IST:** Includes elements such as team membership, adherence to timelines, and required documentation;

(2) **Student assessment:** Includes problem-identification based on assessment in the instructional curriculum, life stressors and coping skills, and/or discipline techniques used with the student;

(3) **Design and implementation of classroom interventions:** Includes the establishment of the intervention in the regular classroom by the support teacher or other team member and the teacher's incorporation of the intervention into the regular classroom routine;

(4) **Team work:** Includes the IST's engagement in a collaborative problem-solving process;

(5) **Screening by IST and referral to multidisciplinary evaluation:** Includes procedures for identifying students for instructional support and the use of the IST process to screen students for further MDE;

(6) **Training:** Includes the school's participation in all required training activities leading to the validation review;

(7) **Outcomes:** Includes required documentation (e.g., reports to Department of Education of number of students served by IST) as well as school-kept data on IST effectiveness for individual students.

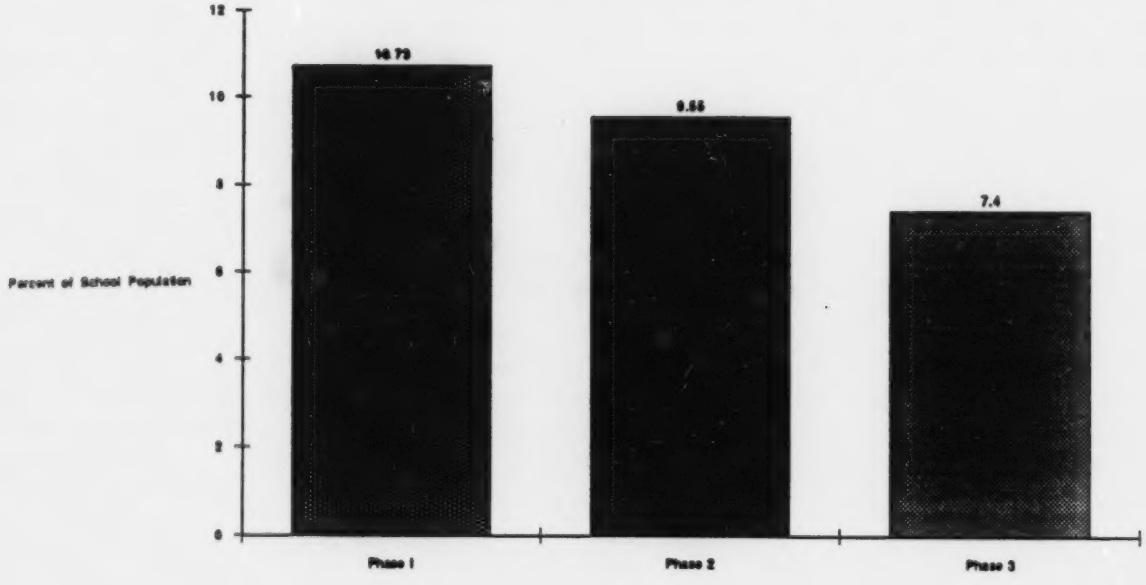
Based on the results of the validation process, a district or school will receive additional training and support as needed. Schools achieving validation are eligible to use their special education allocation for IST costs in ensuing years.

To date, approximately ninety-eight percent (98%) of the schools that have been reviewed have met all of the basic validation requirements. In addition, based on independent ratings, over 90% of schools reviewed have in place the elements deemed to be indicative of effective practice within two years of initiation of the program.

Numbers of Students Served by IST

Figure 1 indicates that the longer a school has been involved in the IST program, the more frequently teachers use the process. In 1992-93, schools in Phase III (first year of training) identified 7.4 % of their student population for instructional support. Phase II (in operation for two years) identified 9.6% of the student population. Phase I schools that have been involved in IST since the 1990-91 school year (third year of operation) identified 10.7%. In an average school of 500 students, 10% of the population equals approximately 50 students served by the IST in a given school in one year. When multiplied by the number of schools that have implemented IST throughout the Commonwealth, is can be estimated that a total of 50,000 elementary students have been assisted by the IST process annually.

Students identified for instructional support in the 1992-93 school year by phases of entry into IST program

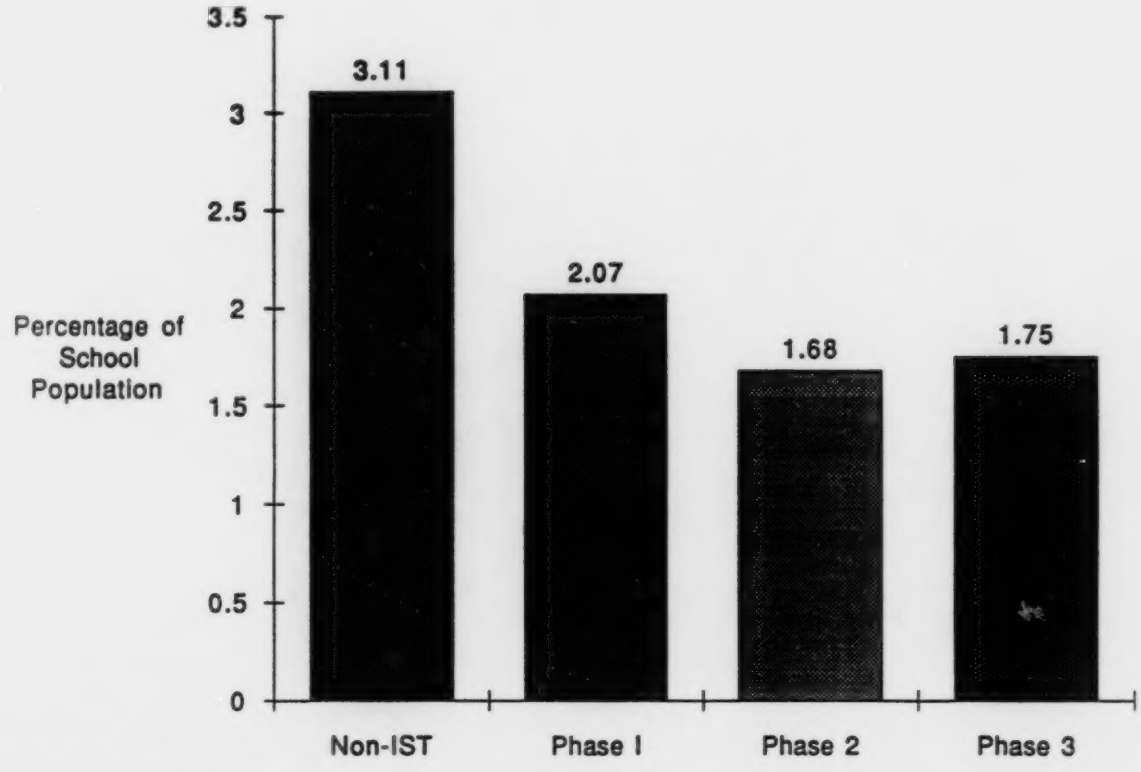


Phase 1 (n=155); Phase 2 (n=174); Phase 3 (n=238).

Placements in Special Education

Since the initiation of the project, it has been a goal of the IST program that referrals for multidisciplinary evaluation (MDE) for special education and ultimately placements in special education would be decreased because teachers would become better able to provide effective instructional programs for students in the regular classroom. Figure 2 compares referral rates for MDE in schools that were using IST during the 1992-93 school year with those schools that had not yet implemented the IST process. These data indicate that teachers in non-IST schools refer approximately 3% of the student population for MDE, while teachers in IST schools refer 2% or less of the population. This represents a decrease in MDE requests of between 34% and 46%.

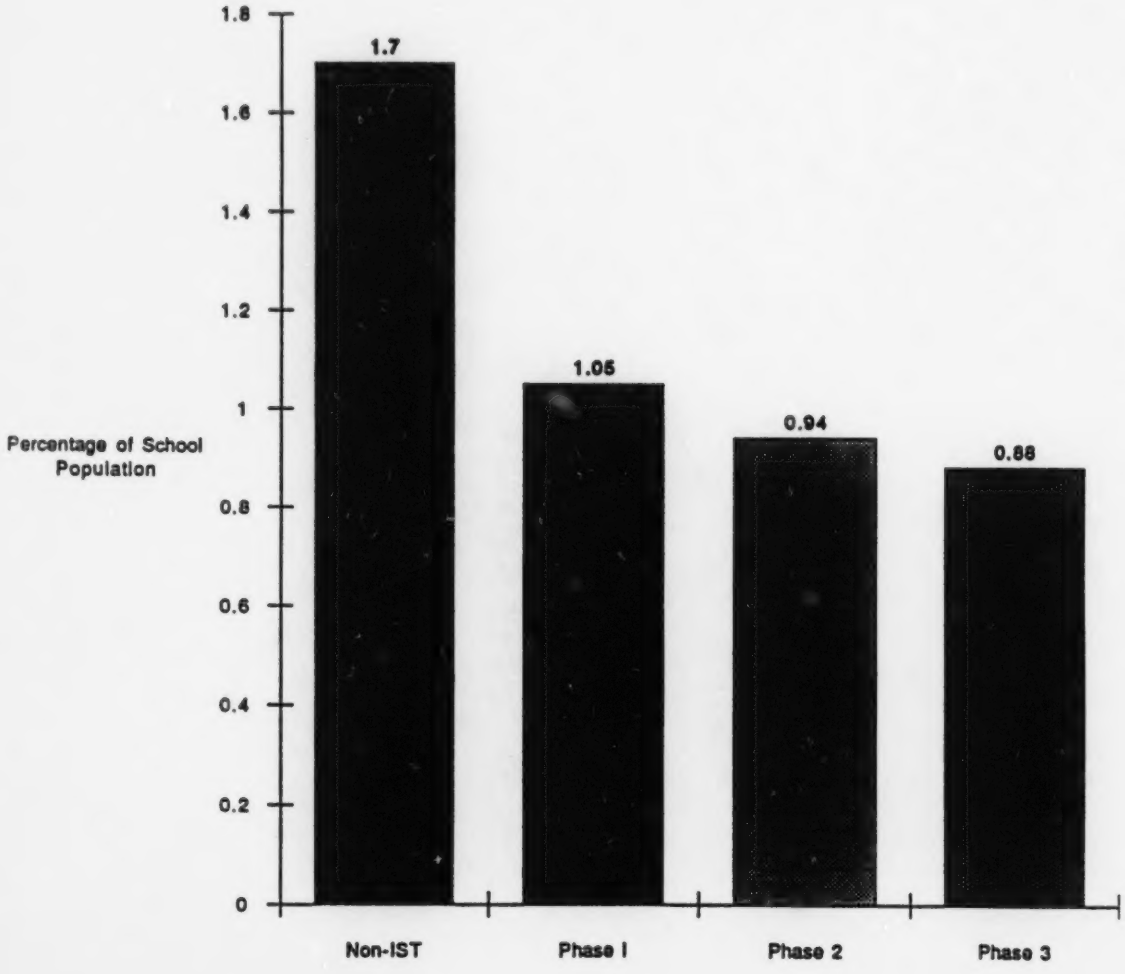
Students referred to MDE during 1992-93 school year in IST (Phases 1, 2, 3) and non-IST schools



N=schools: Non-IST (n=184); Phase 1 (n=155); Phase 2 (n=174); Phase 3 (n=238).

The graph indicates the actual number of students who are placed in special education as a result of instructional support. Again, a substantial difference can be observed between schools that had not yet enrolled in the process (non-IST) and schools in various phases of the IST program. These data indicate that students involved in the IST process are placed at the rate of 1% or less of the school population. In an average school of 500 students, five or fewer students are being identified for special education as a result of IST. Compared to schools that are not using the process, these data represent differences of between 39% and 49%.

Students identified as eligible for special education during 1992-93 school year in IST (Phases 1, 2, 3) and non-IST schools

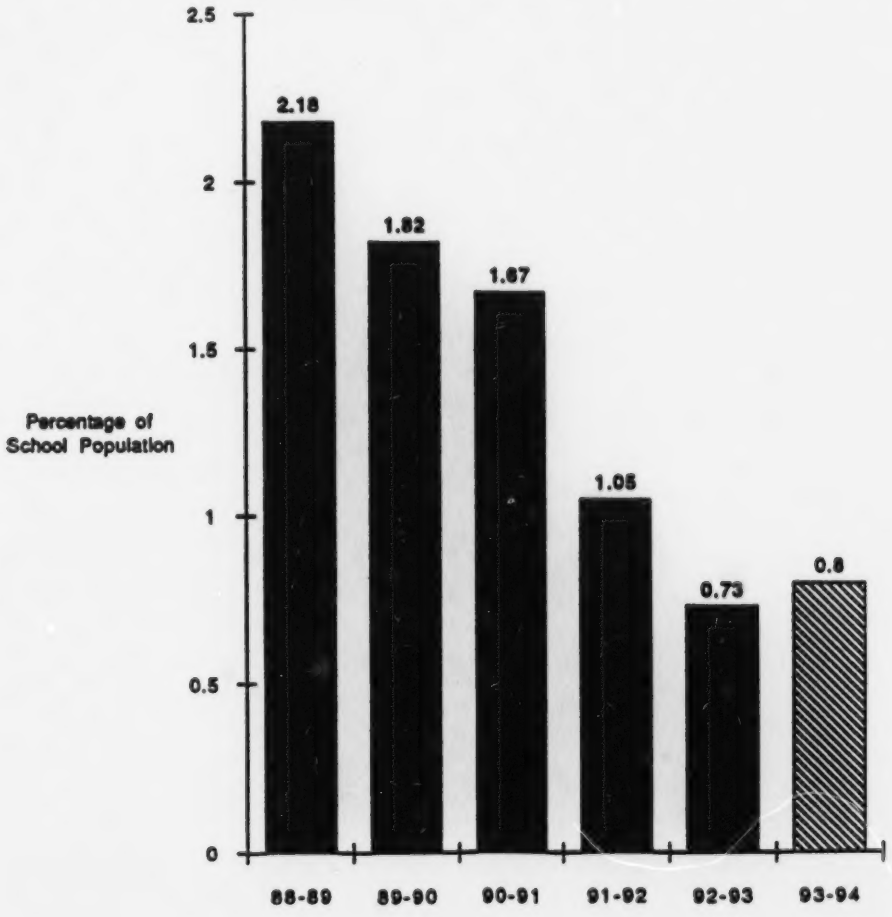


N=schools: Non-IST (n=184); Phase 1 (n=155); Phase 2 (n=174); Phase 3 (n=238).

Retention in Grade

Another goal of the IST Project has been that retentions in grade would be used less frequently in schools that utilize the IST process. For Phase I, Phase II, and Phase III schools, substantial decreases in the use of retention in grade have be seen during the years of implementation of instructional support. Figure 4 displays representative data from Phase I schools. Compared to data from years prior to IST, schools are seeing as much as a 67% decrease in the use of retention in grade. It should be noted that these trends can be seen as a possible predictor of subsequent decreases in drop-outs as these students enter high school.

Percentages of students retained in grade before and after implementation of IST in Phase 1 schools



Note. Phase 1 schools started IST in 1990-91. Based on data from 99 schools.

Effects on Student Achievement

It is also recognized that instructional support cannot be seen as an effective process if referrals to special education and retentions decrease, but students do not improve in their academic achievement. Results of a study conducted with students identified for instructional support in Phase I and Phase II indicate that the students displayed increases in academic learning time variables (time on task, task completion, and task comprehension) as compared to students who were in schools without IST (academically at-risk) only if the schools displayed a high level of implementation in their IST validation process. The expected increases in academic achievement were evidenced when the school had in place an IST process that closely approximated the training components. When the school had a low implementation of the IST training components, their results on student achievements were negligible as compared to schools that had not initiated IST. That is, students profited from involvement in IST only if the school used the IST process as it was designed.

SUMMARY

In 1682, William Penn produced a document called **Fundamental Laws of the Province of Pennsylvania**. This basic policy statement contained this rule governing education:

> **All persons having children shall cause such to be instructed in reading and writing, so that they may be able to read ... and to write by the time they attain to twelve years of age and that then they be taught some useful trade or skill.**

With this law, it was recognized that the educational needs of ALL children of ALL learning abilities were considered important. Pennsylvania's instructional support concept brings that original focus into a modern perspective. Established on the basic idea that all education is special, instructional support reinforces the belief that the purpose of education is to develop every student's capacity for successful service in adult life.

Benefits from the IST Initiative are evident. Rates of both retention in grade and special class placement have been reduced, demonstrating that when appropriate support is provided, diverse student needs CAN be served in the regular class. Such outcomes help districts to reduce costs considerably. In addition, schools with the IST process in place are able to offer support services to more youngsters since formal testing is no longer required in order for such services to be delivered. Staff development is increased as IST training reaches entire faculties through each individual teacher's involvement with the procedures. Finally, parents of referred students in both regular and special education become integral members of the process, providing a strong home-school bond.

This report was designed to share the story of the IST process as it has developed in Pennsylvania. Instructional support represents a fluid system of problem-solving driven by student needs, not by inflexible procedures. It offers successful programs within the regular classroom for the student at risk of school failure. Most importantly, instructional support maximizes all teaching resources within the school and connects schools with parents and community services. Thus, the needs of all students are better met in an integrated, systematic fashion.

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What Is IST?

The Instructional Support Team (IST) is an innovative program whose goals are to maximize individual student success in the regular classroom, while at the same time serving as a screening process for students who may be in need of special education services. IST is a positive, success-oriented program which uses specific assessment and intervention techniques to help remove educational, behavioral, or affective stumbling blocks for all students in the regular classroom.

The program shifts the critical question in education from asking "What's wrong with the student?" to asking "What resources can we use to increase the student's chances for success?" IST answers this question through a team approach that provides for greater cohesiveness, coordination, and instructional continuity, and complements existing curriculum and instructional programs.

Any elementary student who experiences consistent academic or behavioral problems may be a candidate for IST. This includes students beginning to display problems in regular education, as well as students with disabilities who are included in regular education programs. Students are identified for IST services by the classroom teacher, other educators, or parents.

Who Are The Members of the IST?

Although members of the IST may differ from school to school, the team always includes the building principal, the student's classroom teacher, and the support teacher. The parents are encouraged to participate as active partners in the process. The school psychologist, guidance counselor, Chapter I teacher, speech pathologist, school nurse, and representatives from community agencies may also serve on the IST, depending on the needs of the student.

The IST determines what strategies should be implemented to help the student achieve success in the regular classroom. The IST concept is based on team work. Collaboration and joint planning occur throughout the entire process. Each member of the team has equal input and decision-making power to determine what methods, learning strategies, special techniques, or programs best address the student's area(s) of weakness.

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Who Is The Support Teacher?

The support teacher is selected by the district and works under the supervision of the building principal. The support teacher helps coordinate, collaborate, assess, train, and assist the school staff in meeting the specific instructional needs of students who struggle within regular classroom programs.

Support teachers perform classroom observations, conduct curriculum-based assessments, consult with classroom teachers about students considered for instructional support, and participate in all IST meetings. The support teacher facilitates intervention techniques in the classroom. As a student shows success, the support teacher's direct involvement is phased out in favor of the classroom teacher or other education personnel.

Support teachers are specially trained through the Instructional Support Team Project of the Bureau of Special Education, Pennsylvania Department of Education.

How Does IST Work?

The IST process involves three steps:

1. identifying a student's need for academic or behavioral support;
2. determining the strategies needed to assist the student;
3. implementing intervention strategies through a continuum of services.

After an initial assessment of the student's academic, behavioral, and/or coping skills, the IST recommends strategies to be implemented to help the student achieve success in the regular classroom. The team determines what support is needed for the student to maintain a level of success in the classroom. These strategies are evaluated by the team after 30 days, based on the goals set for the student. If the student's teacher reports a positive change, the strategies are continued. If there is no progress, the student is referred for a multidisciplinary evaluation (MDE) which may recommend special education services.

The IST process in elementary schools represents a system of problem-solving driven by students' needs. At the core of the process is the belief that ***all students can learn and that all students matter.*** *IST maximizes the teaching resources within schools by incorporating the best of regular and special education in A SYSTEMATIC SEARCH FOR WHAT WORKS!*

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The Instructional Support Team

A Systematic Search for What Works!

IST Reduces Special Education Placements

Initial results of the implementation of IST show that the number of students placed in special education decreased by over 40%.

Why is this good for students?

- Earlier intervention and more immediate attention to a student's difficulties can prevent eventual needs for special education services.
- A student supported in the regular classroom achieves more than a student placed in a separate special education program.

Why is this good for schools?

- IST helps schools avoid the extra costs of special education, estimated to be an additional $2000 per student, per year.
- Most students are placed in special education in the primary grades, and once placed, remain in special education throughout their entire school experience. For example, if a student is placed in special education in second grade, instructional costs for this student are estimated to be an additional $20,000 through graduation. If IST reduces by ten the number of students placed in special education, the district could expect to save $200,000 by maintaining these students in regular education classes.

An effective way to present these ideas to your local school board would be to calculate your district's savings for one year and its projected savings for a five- or ten-year period.

IST

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A Systematic Search for What Works!

How IST Helps Reduce Rates of Student Retention

Grade retention has serious negative effects on student achievement, self-concept, and attitudes toward school.

- ". . .available evidence leaves little doubt that retention is ineffective. Promotion is more effective for increasing achievement and fostering personal, social, psychological, and emotional development."[1]
- "Retained students who think they are failures internalize that belief and low achievement becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy."[2]
- "For many children, the seeds of failure are planted during the initial school years."[3]
- "Once students are considered candidates for retention, all further educational decisions surrounding them should be viewed as critical since these children are also at risk of never receiving a high school diploma."[4]

"Grade retention is a costly and largely ineffective way to deal with academic failure."[5]

- "Retention of pupils results in a need for additional teachers, facilities, and materials at a rate [approximating] the rate of retention."[6]
  (For example, if a district's average retention rate is seven percent, the percent of increase to the budget to support students retained is approximately seven percent.)
- It is estimated that ". . .every $1 spent on early prevention and intervention can save $4.74 in costs of remedial education, welfare and crime further down the road. . . . How much are we willing to pay now to avoid paying almost five times as much later?"[7]

The IST process represents an alternate solution for students who are at risk of failing. The intervention strategies and support available to students through IST provide opportunities for students to succeed.

- ***If this is your first year for IST, you might present the rate of retention and related costs to your local school board and project how IST is expected to reduce those numbers. (Data supporting reductions may also be available from districts with similar demographics that are in the second or third year of IST. Ask your IST consultant.)***
- ***If this is the second or third year for IST in your district, you should have actual numbers demonstrating a reduction in students retained. You can translate those numbers to show reduced costs for your district.***

(continued)

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[2]Thomas, A.H. (1992). *Alternatives to retention: If flunking doesn't work, what does?* Eugene, OR: Oregon School Study Council, University of Oregon. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 343 209).

[3]Ostrowski, P.A. (1987). *Twice in one grade = a false solution.* Providence, RI: Rhode Island State Department of Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 300 119).

[4]Ibid.

[5]Attributed to Dr. Margaret A. Dawson, past president of the National Association of School Psychologists.

[6]Balow, I.H. & Schwager, M. *Retention in grade: A failed procedure.*

[7]Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. (1988). *America's shame; An erica's hope. Twelve million youth at risk.* Chapel Hill, NC.

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How IST Can Benefit Inclusion

An important goal of IST is to maximize resources for ALL students' success in the regular classroom. To this end, IST supports the concept of inclusion. "Inclusion involves the regular class placement of students with disabilities with appropriate in-class support, for the maximum extent possible."[1]

The benefits of IST and inclusion affect all members of the school community. Some of these benefits include:

For Students with Disabilities:

- increased levels of student interaction, appropriate and frequent interaction with peers;
- improved and enhanced social skills;
- higher quality special education programs;
- positive post-school adjustment and employment after graduation.

For Regular Education Students:

- positive attitudes toward peers with disabilities created by participation in integrated activities;
- improvement in self-concept, growth in social cognition; increased tolerance of other people, reduced fear of human differences, development of personal principles, interpersonal acceptance and friendship;
- increased awareness of the needs of others.

For Parents of Students with Disabilities:

- more positive parental expectations linked to participation in integrated activities and settings;
- wider circle of friendships (i.e., those developed with parents of normally developing children).

For Teachers:

- ability to accept, implement, and be open to change;
- increased level of professional confidence;
- improved planning skills;
- increased awareness of the needs of ALL students;
- increased support by special educators in the regular classroom.

[1]McGregor, G. (in press). Inclusion: Accepting the challenge to meet the needs of all students in regular education classrooms. *Pennsylvania Reporter*.

The Instructional Support Team

A Systematic Search for What Works!

How IST Expands Essential School Services

IST increases the amount of time available that student support professionals can give to services that are often understaffed.

IST can save staff time. . .

- by eliminating the need for formal testing to screen students for multidisciplinary evaluation (MDE) by guidance counselors, reading specialists, etc.;
- by decreasing staff time presently consumed in traditional assessment and placement activities for students referred for MDE, especially school psychologists;
- by reducing staff time devoted to special education paperwork and compliance procedures.

IST can increase staff time to address unmet student needs. . .

- by providing important student support services such as counseling and crisis intervention;
- by developing prevention programs (e.g., drug education, personal coping skills, problem-solving/decision-making, etc.);
- by developing individual and school-wide student discipline procedures;
- by increasing instructional support to teachers;
- by enhancing communication with parents and families;
- by increasing coordination with community agencies.

When presenting the benefits of IST to your local school board, give examples of additional or enhanced programs and services that could be offered in your district by reallocating staff time made available as a result of IST.

The Instructional Support Team

A Systematic Search for What Works!

How IST Supports Staff Development

Which schools receive IST training?

- Initial training for elementary schools is occurring in five phases, with approximately 100 school districts participating in each new phase. Phase I school districts began in the 1990-91 school year. Phase V will be completed in 1994-95.
- Expansion of the training to the other elementary schools in districts that have started initial IST training is provided as state or local funds become available.
- A pilot program for IST in secondary schools began in the 1992-93 school year.

Who provides the training?

- Initial IST training is provided by regional consultants who work as part of the Instructional Support System of Pennsylvania. These consultants provide a full year of training for schools that are beginning the IST process.
- After the initial year, IST consultants from the Intermediate Units' Statewide Support Initiative work with districts to provide follow-up training. These consultants also frequently provide services to expand training to new schools in these districts.

What kind of training is provided by the IST process?

- Training is provided to teachers, principals, support teachers, and educational specialists who are regularly involved in the IST process in the building.
- Training is provided in the process of instructional support for students who are experiencing difficulty in the regular classroom, as well as in methods of providing instructional support to students with disabilities who are included in the regular classroom. Content of the training focuses on five components: collaboration, curriculum-based assessment, instructional adaptations, student assistance, and effective interaction patterns.
- IST consultants emphasize a hands-on method of training in which skills are directly demonstrated in actual classroom situations. These activities are followed by guided practice for school staff who are involved in the IST.
- A special training to begin the IST process is provided to principals in the summer before initial implementation of IST in their schools. This training is entitled the Pennsylvania Principals' Training Model.
- Mid-way during the initial year of IST implementation, an off-campus intensive training is held for the instructional support team to assist them in working effectively as a team.
- As the school begins to implement instructional support, IST consultants regularly conduct needs assessments to individualize the training for each school. The goal is for all school personnel to have a working understanding of the instructional support process.

A presentation to your local school board might include an overview of the training that is provided to prepare your district for IST.